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The engineering skills gap – no quick fix

Sir/Madam,

The skills gap in UK engineering has taught us a valuable lesson: there is no such thing as quick fix. British engineering will only progress through sustained collaborative efforts, consistency and a cultural shift.

As the Perkins Review highlighted last year, parents, teachers, employers and the Government should collaborate to encourage young people from any background to regard engineering as a fulfilling and exciting career.

However, collaboration is nothing without consistency. Genuine passion is cultivated in our early years. A child who regards science class as a chore is unlikely to become an accomplished engineer. Children should be encouraged and motivated to see how science can help them understand and change the world and the message should be reinforced constantly during school years.

Furthermore, what our industry needs is a cultural shift to help shatter outmoded stereotypes. Engineering does not equal manual labour; it is a world of thrilling and rewarding career opportunities. Engineering is not only for men; it welcomes people from both genders, all ethnic backgrounds and any walk of life. Engineering is anything but dull; it's one of the most imaginative and creative professions in the world.

Lucy Ackland, who has just won the Women's Engineering Society Prize at the IET's Young Woman Engineer of the Year Awards, had to work hard to persuade her teachers that she wanted to leave school at 16 to become an apprentice at Renishaw. She went on to achieve a first class honours engineering degree and has led a project team developing our next generation of metal 3D printing machine.

As a leading UK engineering company, in theory Renishaw should have been among the first whose recruitment suffered as a result of the skills gap. However the number of our apprentice and graduate applications has trebled in the last few years, as a direct result of our collaborations with schools, universities, STEM-based organisations, career advisors and Government agencies.

There is no hasty remedy for the UK's shortage of engineers. The only solution is a continuous, combined effort to make the profession more appealing to young people, their parents and teachers. It won't take one year, five or ten. It is a perennial commitment that we make to future generations.

Yours faithfully,

Sir David Roberts McMurtry CBE,
Chairman and Chief Executive

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